

## HOPE (10/18/2020).

In a world of fear, stress, and sadness, it can become quite easy to develop a negative attitude and view of our world. There seems to be more pain than we can heal or bear, more dissent than we can possibly mediate, and more uncertainty than we can make sense of. In times like these, what options are there to comfort us and bring forth the light of a positive attitude? I don't know if it's the news media, social media, or election year politics. But it certainly does appear as though we are living in a world in crisis.

The difference between those who let their circumstances bring them down and those who choose to embrace the goodness of life and find that comfort lies with the important element of hope. Hope is a powerful antidote to feelings of despair, desperation, and isolation. A life marked by hope is a life marked by optimism.

To say that the last eight months have been challenging, maddening, frustrating and so on, would be something of an understatement. But throughout the eight months, one word, one idea, one thought has been constant. That word is hope. And that is what this message is about. Hope.

Let me share a passage from Jeremiah; from chapter 29, verse 11:

“For I know the plans I have for you” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

So what is hope? And why do we need it? We all hope for something. How many times in the past few months have we all said “I hope that.....” Fill in the blank. Or, my hope is that...". Again, fill in the blank.

Hope is an expectation or desire, for a certain thing to happen. And it's invariably something positive. I mean who hopes that this pandemic never ends!? Or that you don't have safe travels?

Hope. That expectation and desire for a certain thing to happen. The hope in what God has promised. And we know that God will fulfill His promise to us because of His faithfulness.

Why do we need hope? Hope sustains us. To have hope is to want an outcome that will make life better in some way. Not only can it make a current difficult situation more bearable, but also can eventually improve our lives because looking forward to a better future may motivate us to make it happen. Everyone hopes for something. Hope is an inherent part of our humanity. Hope helps us to define what we want in the future.

Think about the passages that have been read over the past few weeks from Exodus; escape from slavery, starvation, thirst, grumbling, and turning from God. Complaining to Moses about practically everything. It's almost as if they were remembering fondly their days as slaves. But it seems in spite of all their trials and travails, the Israelites always had hope. Expecting to reach the land of milk and honey promised to them by God. No matter how difficult life became, they had hope. And in reading between the lines, we can see that Moses has had a terrible burden on him for a long time. Leading the children of Israel turned out to be much more difficult than he ever imagined. Now he's running on empty; running on fumes. He's overworked, overextended, and stressed out. He's about to drop! At some point, we've all felt like that. Our world is crazy. Pandemics dominate the news, there's information overload, family responsibilities, and heavy burdens at work.

In today's world of pandemics, presidential elections, and just trying to figure out what's going on, I think about the conversations I have with family and friends. And one common theme always comes through; everyone is busy! At first blush, busyness doesn't seem to be such a big deal or a crisis to be dealt with. But the truth of the matter is that busyness can be draining. Just like Moses. Sometimes we feel like we have gone as far as we can go on our own power, and if God is not going with us, then we might just as well sit down and not go anymore. That's the way Moses felt. But he was having a remarkable conversation with God. In verses 15 and 16, Moses says to the Lord, "if your presence doesn't go with me, don't carry us up from here. For how would people know that I have

found favor in your sight, I and your people, from all the people who are on the surface of the earth?” Moses was simply unwilling to go on without the presence of God. At least Moses was aware of his real need. He needed the presence of God and the hope that His presence brings. We would all do well to recognize that need for God’s presence in our own fast paced, and sometimes, crazy world.

Now, we could leave the story here, but Moses conversation with God isn’t the end of the story. Because while God doesn’t make it so obvious, there is something that He says which gives us a ray of light in the darkness. What He says doesn’t wipe out our problems; it doesn’t take our problems away. But maybe, just maybe, it gives us just enough to hold on a little longer and keep trusting in God that the future really does contain hope. And what does God say? There is one phrase used in verse 22 that leads us to a better understanding: “When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by.” And then He says “then I will remove my hand, and you will see my back....” So what is being said here? I think God is saying that when we are in a dark time in our lives, we may not be able to see Him, but we can know Him by his past deeds, by his past acts. We can know God’s faithfulness to us in the present day as we learn to look back on our lives and remember how He has always been faithful to us in the past. We can be sure that God will not leave us alone now as we learn to look back on our lives and think how He never deserted us before when we were struggling through difficult times.

We may not be able to see God today, but we remember His love and faithfulness from when he passed by before:

We may not be able to feel God today, but we remember his compassion and kindness as we see his back in our past.

When we find ourselves in times of darkness, struggling with issues of faith, or health, or grief, or loss, or fear, we usually want to have God’s glory revealed to

us in the here and now and we become frustrated when that doesn't happen. But look back; realize that through it all, God has never left you, He has never been unfaithful to you, and if that is true of your past, it can give you hope in whatever present troubles you may find yourself in, because God never changes. As He was to you then, He shall be to you now and in the future. God says to each one of us "my presence will go with you, and I will give you rest. I know you by name." During any of our present struggles, God will put us in a cleft in a rock, and will cover us with his hand, and His glory will be closer than we may think, even if we can't hear it, or see it, or feel it. And when our current struggles are over, we will be able to testify again with real joy in our hearts about the God who has passed by, and in a way that we can't really figure out, has given us the strength to endure. God says "My presence will go with you and I will give you rest."

Even if we can't feel it today, that is truth. And it will be enough for us today, and tomorrow, and every day until the storm passes us by. Let us pray:

O God, show me your glory, so that I can show your glory to everyone else.

God, there's so much going on right now, and you call us to drop back, maybe even to rest in the cleft of a rock somewhere, so that you will continue to show us your glory. Amen.